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ABSTRACT

Control of entry into teacher education programs should be a function of the teaching profession, with philosophy and parameters set by the professional associations while policy and procedures are set by the teacher training institutions. This problem is approached by examination of conditions that prevail in Louisiana. A strong foundation in state law is found for control of entry by the teacher training institutions, but there is a recent tendency to propose highly specific criteria which represent direct control of entry. State agencies and boards have recently recommended stricter entry standards. State accreditation standards have refrained from specification of criteria, leaving control of entry with the schools of education. No demands, directions, or levels of performance are described by the guidelines for program approval at the state level. In Louisiana, there is no evidence of professional associations' influence on the control of entry into teacher education programs, even though the need has been expressed by various associations. Enrollment-based formula funding, with its premium on numbers, may be a powerful influence on the current attitude of university training programs toward control of entry. Control of entry should be a professional responsibility in which the power is drawn from the practicing profession. A standing commission should be established to recommend parameters for selective admissions. This committee, composed of members appointed by the executive board of the state education association and by the Council of Deans of Colleges of Education, would report to those groups on the status of selective admissions in the state. Independent of any other agencies, the commission would address all attempts to regulate control of entry. (JD)

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Teacher Education Program Admissions

- A Case Analysis

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October 30, 1981

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Teacher Education Program Admissions

A Case Analysis

The issue of control of entry into teacher education programs has not yet caused strong-willed forces to meet in fierce debate in a struggle for leadership and the right and power to make the decisions about who shall study to become teachers. Quite the contrary, the process usually attracts but little attention in the professional literature and professional conferences.

This paper assumes the position that control of entry should be a function of the teaching profession with the philosophy and parameters set by the professional associations while policy and procedures for implementation are set by the teacher training institutions.

Entry into the profession is a professional resource that affects the full range of characteristics of qualified teachers including supply. That this fundamental resource should remain with the profession to be husbanded by the teacher education component is basic in the drive for professional status and autonomy. Legislation, board rulings, and bureau regulations that establish criteria for entry are viewed as usurpation of that professional resource and of the responsibility that accompanies professional status.

The problem is approached by examination of certain conditions that prevail in a single case, the State of Louisiana. A number of influences with potential to affect control of entry are considered. First is the law which is confined to examination of the statutes. Although suits have been brought against institutions of teacher education, these suits have not sought to relocate control of entry into the program, therefore, a review of court decisions is not included in this study. Other influences included in this study are rules and regulations of governing boards comparable to state boards of education and higher education coordinating boards, accreditation standards

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applied by state and national agencies, and the influence of professional associations.

Although no attempt is made to quantify levels or intensity, control of entry has been a minimal activity. Teacher education programs traditionally have featured open enrollment with minimal or no requirements set by the teacher training department and no barriers erected by professional associations. Major changes in this tradition during recent years have been increasing activity by the legislature and a keen competition for students.

The Law

The law first spoke to the question of entry into teacher education in 1968. Act 390 of the 1968 legislature provided that persons partially or totally blind, who otherwise were qualified, could not be denied training for the purpose of becoming a teacher. (State of Louisiana, 1968) Nine years later the legislature spoke directly to entry. Act 756 of 1977 provided that prior to entry into a teacher education program, a student must have three hours of counseling related to the suitability and aptitude of the student for teaching and the availability of jobs. (State of Louisiana, 1977) This counseling is to be conducted by " . . . university counseling services outside the teacher education program." "In addition, the applicant shall have attained a 2.20 average in all course work attempted . . . as a condition for entrance into a teacher education program." (State of Louisiana, 1977, p. 2080) Nowhere in the law is an agency directed to provide for an entry process, nor is an institutional structure or office other than the guidance counselor mentioned. However, Act 756 directly addresses the subject of entry into the teacher education program as if a process of selective admission conducted by the training institution is in place and functioning on a regular basis. By choosing not to direct an executive agency or board to regulate the process and by directing its language to the university,

the law recognizes the locus of control at the university level. However, by setting specific criteria, the legislature takes for itself a portion of the procedures for control. The stage was set to control the process by law with the teacher education unit functioning as the executive agency.

Agencies and Boards

The State Department of Education in Louisiana has been curiously inactive in the field of selective admissions. There is no regulation relating to the practice of admitting students to the teacher education program. Considering the eager nature of state boards of education in recent years, the activism with which they have dealt with curriculum, personnel, and even course objectives in certain instances, silence on the practice of admission to the programs seems more than oversight. A researcher must consider that control of entry, perhaps, is a dubious prize.

While the State Board of Education and its agency, the State Department of Education, have refrained from addressing the subject, the State Board of Regents, the governing board for higher education, recently issued a recommendation calling for stricter standards. (Board of Regents, 1981) It is notable not only for its rarity but for its specificity and for the rationale underlying the recommendation.

The recommendation requires that all freshmen who entered in Fall, 1981, would be admitted to a teacher education program only after attaining an overall score of 16 on the ACT and a GPA of 2.2 on all attempted university course work. That is, when a course is repeated, both grades are included in the calculation of the average. A student who scores 15 on the ACT must acquire a GPA of 2.3 and a GPA of 3.2 is required of students who score 14 on the ACT. No credit can be given for remedial courses. From students who do not meet these criteria, each university "is permitted" to select for admission up to 10% of the total

number of its students who qualify each year. (Board of Regents, 1981) The standards in this recommendation are described as minimal and universities are urged to set even more rigorous standards.

The rationale for selecting the ACT and stated criterion scores is that the ACT has a high positive correlation with the NTE and students who score below 16 have difficulty with the NTE. (Board of Regents, 1981) A major effect of implementation of this standard will be to reduce the rate of failure of students taking the NTE, however, a corollary effect will be to reduce the number of persons actually taking the NTE. Perhaps another effect will be to increase the number of students who take the ACT. At the present time less than 50% of the pupils registered in the Department of Education at LSU-S have taken the ACT.

Teacher education institutions in Louisiana will be concerned about the proportion of students who have taken the ACT because of a law passed in 1980, Act 800. (State of Louisiana, 1980) At the time Act 800 was passed, teacher educators were highly concerned with the section that requires the dean or his designee to observe teacher educators in their classes and to submit written reports of the observations to the president or chancellor of the institution. Another section requires evaluation and counseling of all students upon initial entry into the institution offering the teacher education program. The act goes on to provide that, "A student shall not be required to expend any funds . . for testing nor required to take a test that he deems . . . invasive of his privacy." (State of Louisiana, 1980) Whether compliance with the Regents' recommendation would make the institution liable for the cost of 50 to 100 ACT's, perhaps is not clear. Possibly of equal concern is the clause which permits the student to refuse to take the test on grounds that his privacy is being invaded. If the law applies to entry into the teacher education program, it essentially invalidates the Regents' plan and any other efforts to utilize tests or evaluative instruments which are administered to the student as part

of the admissions process. A principle of equitable application of admissions criteria would not permit denial of admission to certain students on the basis of low test scores while admitting students who decline to take the test.

By its action in Act 800 the legislature currently is controlling the use of tests in the entry process. The application of this act begs for clarification because of the level of caution required in implementing the Regents' recommendation. At least one university in Louisiana has fully adopted the Regents' recommendation. Their experience should prove instructive to the other programs.

Accreditation Standards

State and NCATE standards, along with those of regional associations, have refrained from specification of criteria, leaving control of entry with the institutions. State accreditation standards require the institution to indicate whether or not there exists a process for selective entry into the program. No demands, directions or levels of performance are described by the guidelines for program approval at the state level.

NCATE guidelines state that selective admissions policy and function should be an active, functional aspect of the program. Although based in the education division, NCATE promotes university-wide participation. The NCATE interest in "teacher education as an all-university function" has, according to Cushman (1977), resulted in the formation of university councils on teacher education. While the entire university contributes to teacher education, the responsibility lies with the professional education unit. (Cushman, 1977) Current research could clarify the effect of campus-wide councils, faculty committees, and other groups that deal with admissions and standards. Power and autonomy to control entry to the program must lie with the professional education unit and not be diluted through distribution to personnel not directly accountable for their decisions.

In its recent revisions, the single NCATE standard has emphasized that admissions criteria should be specific and published but has omitted recommendations for the use of standardized tests. (NCATE, 1976) Through concern for the tendency of consistently applied criteria to identify a population with one, perhaps narrowly defined, set of characteristics, the standard requires evidence that the institution's criteria encourage acceptance of a variety of students. Flexibility, as provided in the Regents' recommendation, by the 10% rule, possibly would meet the NCATE standard, but the designation of a single admissions examination and the use of cut-off scores would not be in compliance.

Subsequent revisions of NCATE standards should address the issue of control by presenting a standard which examines the professional credentials of personnel responsible for selective admissions. Application of the standard would be analagous to examination of credentials of personnel that teach methods courses and supervise practicums.

Professional Units

Control of entry has attracted the attention of philosophers and sociologists who theorize on the nature of professions. Baldridge (1971) treats professionalism in terms of control of resources and resultant levels of autonomy, autonomy being inversely related to extent external control of resources. In its quest for higher professional status, the field, through its various associations, has expressed the need for control of professional resources through selective admission. (NEA, 1976) In Louisiana there is no evidence of influence of professional associations on the flow of control of entry into teacher education programs.

A more cooperative effort, a system which allows for development of the resource of selective admissions by a flow of influence from the professional association to the teacher education community would maintain the resource in

the field and encourage its refinement.

Institutional Practice

In a brief survey of teacher education programs in the Louisiana system, all respondents conducted a process of selective admissions. Fifteen institutions were questioned, thirteen state schools and two private, with fourteen responding.

Five schools required an entrance examination and two, one of which has adopted the Board of Regents' plan, use a cut-off score.

Five schools impose a GPA higher than the minimum required by the law.

Ten schools have a competency requirement but only four of these specify the requirement in terms of clock hours, speech skill, or other competency. The lack of specification, especially in terms of teaching skills and evaluated experience beyond course credit requirements, represents a significant deficiency when applied to the NCATE standard.

Twelve of the fourteen respondents require faculty recommendations. None specify recommendation from a practicing teacher.

Five programs require an interview.

In two instances, vision, hearing, speech or health record requirements are employed. The survey did not investigate the use of acuity levels or health quality criteria in application of these requirements.

While none of the entry processes reported could be described as progressive or highly developed, there is evidence of initiative and meaningful differences among the institutions. Bold action can occur as in the case of the one program which immediately followed the Regents' plan. On the whole, however, the programs are more alike than different and present a traditional, minimal level of control which invites regulations rather than asserting a progressive process that strengthens the professional position. It is the contention of

this paper that control of entry should receive a higher priority among the professional responsibilities of teacher education faculties leading to more positive, rigorous criteria, recommendation from the field and greater diversity among institutions. The current approach is one of caution, perhaps underscored by an attitude that looks to other sources of authority for parameters of decision. To the extent that this occurs, the teacher training institutions in Louisiana give up a portion of control of entry, a measure of autonomy and some professional status. Careful research into current attitudes of teacher education personnel toward control of entry possibly would be helpful in strengthening the process.

Formula Funding

Among the influences affecting teacher education programs in Louisiana and which effectively can mitigate against vigorous control of entry by the institution, is enrollment-based funding. Program administrators are interested in more, not fewer students. Teacher educators in general are aware that faculty salary levels, teaching load and program flexibility are favorably treated by large enrollments. Few teacher education programs are prepared to cut ten to fifteen percent or more of their enrollments by any means. It is not likely that universities will expend high levels of time and energy on procedures to reduce student credit hours.

Summary

In summary, the case presented by Louisiana finds a strong foundation in the law for control of entry by the teacher training institution but a recent tendency to legislate the process. The Board of Regents has proposed highly specific criteria for admission which represent direct control of entry. A survey of institutions revealed a cautious, minimal response to the task. Only one

institution has acted boldly to the recommendations of the Board of Regents and no university had developed outstanding requirements or procedures. Not a single institution was engaging in procedures other than those listed by the questionnaire.

The role of accreditation associations is equivocal. It is a matter of judgment as to whether they are involved in the flow of control. Since the NCATE standards suggest an adoptable direction, the author concedes a place in the control system but recommends a standard which would address the qualifications of personnel responsible for selective admissions.

Significant and conspicuous by its absence is the role of the professional association. Explanation of this vacancy would be presumptious. Perhaps systems research, sociological investigation, or careful historical study would yield instructive information on this aspect of professional development.

Enrollment formula funding, with its premium of numbers, is suggested as a powerful influence on the current attitude of university training programs toward control of entry. It is recommended that control of entry should be a professional responsibility, a high priority task, in which the power exercised by control personnel is drawn from the practicing profession.

Finally, control of entry should emerge as an issue of concern, bringing together the communities of teacher education and the professional associations. A standing commission should be established to study and recommend parameters for selective admissions. This committee, composed of members appointed by the executive board of the state education association and by the Council of Deans of Colleges of Education, would report to those groups on the status of selective admissions in the state. Independent of any other agencies, the commission would address all attempts to regulate control of entry. By developing a unified, progressive position, the profession could speak to the issue and maintain control of the resource within the teacher training institutions.

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